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FRITHIOF SAGA

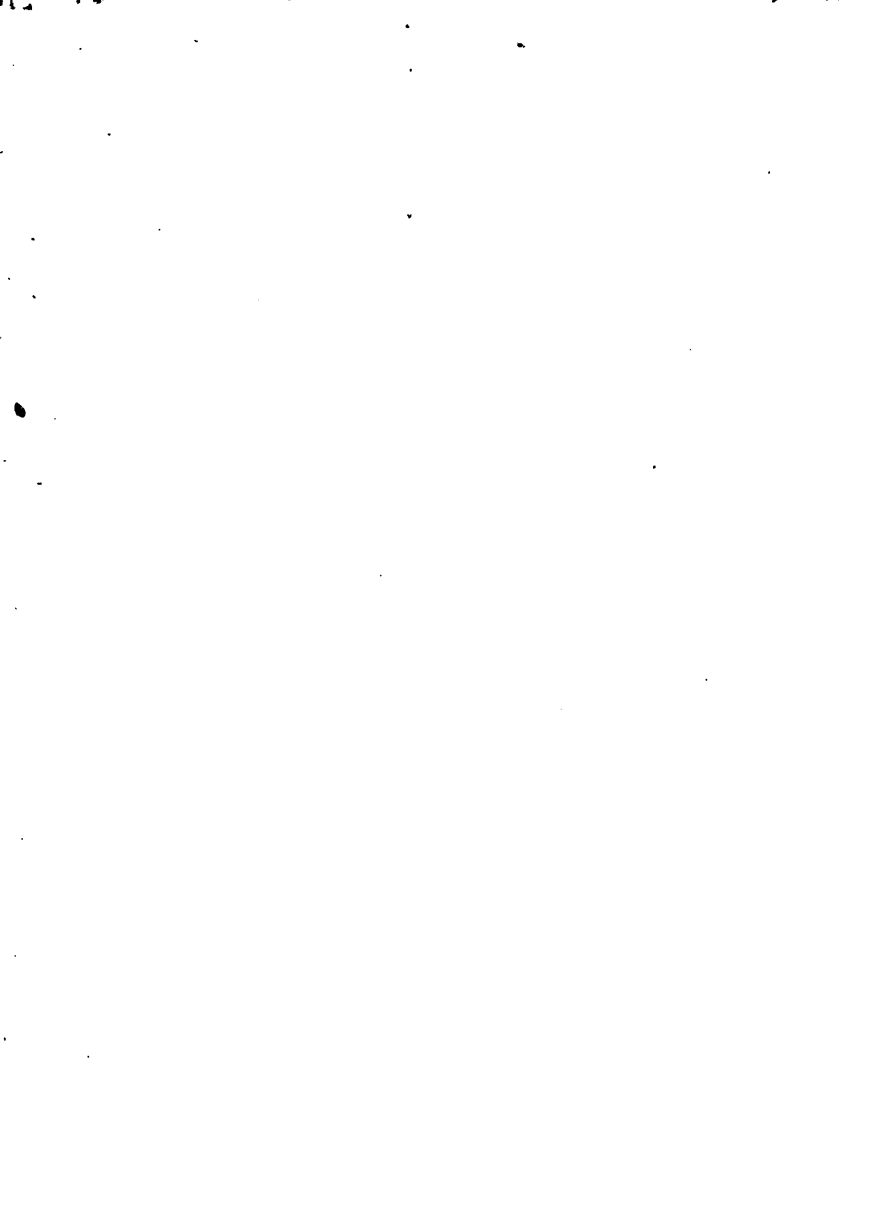


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*Translated from the German of
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BY
GEORGE P. UPTON

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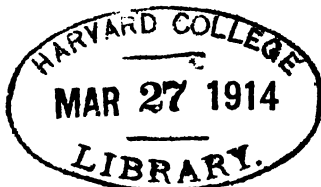
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Translator's Preface

ICELAND is the home of the Saga, a form of literature which includes the telling of the story of a hero's life and adventures in a fixed, regular form, and which is usually intended for recitation, though the Saga is never set in the customary versified style of poetry. A large number of these Sagas, relating to Iceland, Greenland, North America, and the Norse countries, still remain, and among them the Frithiof Saga, narrating the stirring adventures of that hero of the Northland and Viking of its seas, is one of the most beautiful. Its subject is noble, heroic, and free from exaggerated description or overwrought sentiment. Frithiof is a splendid type of the old Norse hero, invincible in battle upon the land, fearless of Nature's wrath as he sails the seas in his dragon ship, impulsive yet just, swift in punishment yet quick in forgiveness. The central motives of the Saga are his love for King Bele's daughter, Ingeborg; the refusal of her brothers to sanction their marriage because the hero is not of royal birth; her unwilling marriage to the old King Ring; Frithiof's exile, and his final union with Ingeborg after the death of her husband and reconciliation

✻ TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE ✻

with her brother. Interwoven with the narrative itself, which is full of dramatic situations, are some of the old myths, than which none is more beautiful than the death of the gentle god Balder. The very breath of the North sweeps through the stately story which the German author has told with so much skill. Those who wish to come in closer contact with the Saga itself can do so by consulting Bishop Tegner's masterly translation.

G. P. U.

CHICAGO, June, 1907.

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Chapter I

Frithiof and Ingeborg

IN olden times there ruled in Norway a King of great renown called Bele, whose wife died early, leaving him two sons and a daughter. When the latter had reached her sixth year, the King said to Thorsten, his brother-in-arms and lifelong friend, "My rosebud, Ingeborg, is the joy of my heart, but none the less I must send her away and entrust her to the guardianship of Hilding the Wise, so that, far from the turmoil and distractions of a court, the light of true knowledge shall be hers. But lest she should miss the companionship of her beloved playfellow, I pray thee permit thy son Frithiof to accompany her, that they may be reared together."

"Gladly will I do so," replied Thorsten; "not alone to honor thy request, but because I know thou hast my son's welfare also at heart in sending him as the companion of thine own child to be taught by the wise Hilding. My King's will shall be done."

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

Hilding's abode lay on the sea-coast, surrounded by gardens and wooded hills, and there Ingeborg and Frithiof spent the years of their childhood, faithfully taught and cared for by the good old man. Two rare blossoms of the Northland were these children, both richly endowed with gifts of mind and body : Ingeborg was like the swelling rosebud within whose heart the promise of the spring lies dreaming, while Frithiof grew up tall and strong as a young oak tree crowned with its crest of rustling leaves. So blessed by the gods were they with health and beauty that never had their like been seen in all the North. Now listening to the wondrous tales of their wise master, with clear eyes uplifted to his ; now racing over the sunny meadows or dancing lightly under the dark boughs of the fir trees in the silvery moonlight, they were like the Light Fairies, whose appearance betokens blessing and fills the heart with anticipations of joy.

Frithiof was but little older than Ingeborg, and when he first learned from Hilding to read the Runic signs, it was his delight to teach them in turn to his beloved playmate. Ofttimes they would sail out upon the wind-tossed sea, and when the shifting of the sail sent foam and spray dashing into the

✻ FRITHIOF AND INGEBORG ✻

boat, Ingeborg would clap her small hands in glee. No tree was too high for the bold lad when he wished to capture a nest of young birds for the King's child; even the osprey's eyrie, high among the rocky crags, was not safe from his daring quest. 'T was he that found for her the first pale blossoms of the springtime, the first ripe strawberry, the summer's first golden ear of corn. Joyously they wandered together in the forest, Frithiof armed to protect his playmate in case of need; for he early strove to train himself in all a hero's duties.

Thus, like a beautiful dream, the happy days of childhood glided by. Ingeborg blossomed into maidenhood, and Frithiof became a stalwart youth. The King's daughter spent more time in her own chamber now, learning the tasks of women, chief of which was the weaving of garments, while Frithiof was often abroad with the men in quest of game or booty. Inheriting not only his father's strength and daring, but also his discretion and cheerfulness, he was beloved by all and soon aroused the wonder of his companions in the chase by the boldness with which he would attack the fiercest beasts, felling them with a blow from his spiky club, or piercing them through with the

 THE FRITHIOF SAGA 

sharp-pronged spear. As in earlier days he had been wont to bring his playmate gifts of flowers or fruit as greetings of the season, so now he laid at her feet the trophies of his prowess — shaggy bears or grisly wild boars, often revealing upon his body bloody traces of the struggle. Admiringly Ingeborg's gaze would rest at such times on the young hero, while her heart beat fast in terror for his life.

And when on cold winter nights they sat together in the great hall by the blazing hearth fire listening to the legends old Hilding told them of the gods, or, when the King's daughter would sing of the deeds of some great hero long at rest beneath his grassy mound, she seemed to Frithiof like a goddess sent by the great All-Father for a brief space to the darksome earth to awaken a foretaste of Valhalla's delights. "Praises of Frigga's golden hair are sung throughout the land," he would say to himself, "but surely it can be no more beautiful than Ingeborg's fair tresses." And when he gazed into those soft eyes, so full of heaven's own light and hue, he doubted Hilding's declaration that the eyes of the goddess Frigga were the most beautiful in all the world.

Chapter II

The Death of Balder

A GAIN the Spring had come. Frigga, the radiant Earth-goddess, had decked meadow hill, and vale with bloom and verdure, and summoned the various warblers of grove and wood. One mild evening Ingeborg and Frithiof repaired with Hilding to a hillside overlooking the sea and seated themselves on the mossy stones. There, while the waves roared at their feet, the master told them of the gentle god Balder, and how envy and malice brought him to his death.

“Balder was a son of the all-powerful Odin and the fair Earth-goddess Frigga, beautiful as the day and so bright that a shining splendor surrounded him as he traversed the dome of heaven on his white steed, swifter than thought. All evil, hatred, and strife were abhorrent to him. Eloquent, wise, mild, and just, he ever sought to promote peace, to avert misfortune, and to ease pain and sorrow. Sometimes, assuming human shape, he would mingle in

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

the combat, but never, even in the heat of battle, did he lift his sword against a mortal. Though the other gods often took part in the strife of men, 'twas to do good alone that drew Balder to the field of battle. Once on a hot summer's day it chanced some warriors were perishing for want of water; whereupon he thrust his spear into the ground, and a cool spring gushed forth, while others welled up wherever his horse's hoofs had trodden. These springs were inexhaustible and still exist, surrounded by sacred groves, wherein the beneficent god will be worshipped to the end of time. Equally gentle and lovely was his spouse Nanna, and far above the clouds, whither the eye of man cannot penetrate, they dwelt in their palace, Silvery Lustre, where nothing evil or impure can ever enter.

"Balder was beloved by all the gods and goddesses save only Loke, the ever-evil, who hated him. One night Balder dreamed that some danger threatened his life, and so alarming was this dream that he could not shake off its shadow, but sad and heavy-hearted, thought only of approaching evil. Sorrow seized not only upon Nanna, his loving wife, but upon all the gods and goddesses, when they learned of the dark forebodings that filled Balder's soul.

✻ THE DEATH OF BALDER ✻

In vain did Odin, his father, spend many days and nights in thought; in vain did he take counsel with the other gods and consult his two wise ravens, who see into the past and future, as to the nature of the danger that threatened his beloved son. At last he determined to undertake the perilous journey to the abode of the goddesses of Fate. Rising from his shining throne, he left the palace, mounted his fire-breathing celestial steed that stood before the door, and, followed by the two ravens and the two wolves who are his constant companions, flew like lightning through the space betwixt heaven and earth and soon reached the path that leads to the kingdom of the pale goddess, Hel, in the terrible underworld.

“Far down below Valhalla, the golden palace of the gods, whither heroes are borne by Odin’s battle-maidens, the Valkyrs, on their winged steeds, lies the dread realm of shadows where abides the inexorable Hel. Loke is her father; her mother — the giantess Angurboda, is a sister of the frightful wolf Fenris and the earth-enveloping serpent. Woe, thrice woe to him who descends into the cold mist-kingdom of the goddess of death! Misery is her Hall, Ruin her Threshold, Pining Sickness her Bed,

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

and Danger the Curtains thereof. Sloth is her Thrall, and Despair her Handmaiden. She eats from the Dish Hunger with the Knife of Famine.

“To this terrible place Odin now took his way. The path, which no living man had ever trodden, led between frightful abysses and icy crags. But he heeded not these terrors nor the furious yelping and snapping of the death-hounds, intent only on learning what evil threatened his favorite son. At last he reached the spot where dwelt the goddesses of Fate, and at the first gray Rune-stone he swung himself from his steed. Below it had lain for a thousand years the Norn who reads the future; while about the desolate tomb the wind moaned through the leafless branches and whirled aloft the parching sand. Odin drew his sword and inscribed thrice with it a Runic sentence in the sand. Then he shouted thrice the Runic call which, uttered by the lips of a god, has power to wake the dead within their graves. In dull, hollow tones a voice answered from the depths :

What mystic spell of sternest might
Penetrates the dungeon's night ?
Stirs me from my sleep of old ?
Who art thou, O stranger bold ?



THE DEATH OF BALDER



Go! let me rest, for here below
Through Winter's snows and Summer's glow,
Through dripping dew and streaming rain,
A thousand years I now have lain.
Ruthless thou stirrest the dead's deep rest —
Who mayst thou be, thou stranger guest?

“And Odin answered:

A wanderer I, unknown my name;
A warrior's son, untold my fame;
Of the upper world I would not know,
But fain would seek of those below.
For whom is the glittering table spread?
For whom prepared the golden bed?

“Again the hollow tones responded:

Sawest thou not in beaker bright
Draught of sweet mead, foaming light?
O'er it hangs the golden shield
Warrior's arm no more shall wield!
Balder's coming these betoken;
Balder's death doom hath been spoken!

This rede reluctant have I told —
Now get thee gone, thou stranger bold.
Leave the weary to her rest
And come no more, whate'er thy quest.

“Down in the abyss the mists rolled and parted,
permitting Odin for an instant to gaze into the joy-
less realm of death, and he saw that all was indeed

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

made ready to receive his beloved son. With the tears starting to his eyes he mounted his steed and turned sadly homeward. Loud cries of woe broke from the waiting gods and goddesses when Odin told them the saying of the Norn. Vainly they sought some means by which the doom of their favorite might be averted, till at last Frigga bethought her of a plan, which was hailed with joy by all. As mistress of the earth, she bound by oath everything that existed thereon, fire and water, iron and all the other metals, rock and soil, bush and tree, all disease or poison, with all created beings of the earth, the air, and the water, — not to harm her son. Alone of the tender mistletoe that hangs from the bough, she took no oath, for from that she feared nothing.

“Deeming their favorite safe from harm, the gods in their joy began to sport with him. Some flung sharp-pointed spears at him, and lo! they fell harmless to the ground. Others smote his uncovered head with their keen blades, yet not a hair of his head was injured. Bright and laughing as a fair spring morning, the god stood in their midst, catching the hissing darts and lances in his hands. Their joyous cries at last reached the ears of Loke,

✻ THE DEATH OF BALDER ✻

whose only pleasure it was to awaken strife and discontent within the hearts of gods and men, and he hastened thither to blight, if it might be, these heaven-born flowers of joy. Taking the form of an aged dame with a staff in her trembling hand, he approached the goddess Frigga, and said :

“‘Tell me, I pray thee, O watchful Earth-mother, wherefore the gods are glad, so that I may share their joy.’

“Frigga replied : ‘All nature has sworn to me to do no harm to my son Balder. His life was in great peril, but now shall the Norn’s rede be brought to naught, nor shall he descend into the kingdom of pale Hel.’

“But Loke asked : ‘Didst thou take oath of everything upon the earth?’

“And Frigga answered : ‘Of all save the tender mistletoe that grows east of Valhalla: from that surely there is naught to fear.’

“Now was Loke rejoiced, for mistletoe causes the death of the tree from which it draws its life. Slipping softly out from the gates of Valhalla, he hastened to where it grew, and, breaking it off, fashioned from the tough stem a dart which he sharpened to the keenest point. Then, as the old

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

woman, he again joined the circle of the gods still busy with their sports. Perceiving Höder, the blind god, who stood apart listening to his companion's joyous cries but unable to share their sports, he drew near and said to him :

“ ‘Why dost thou too not hurl the spear or speed the dart?’

“ ‘Alas! How can I?’ replied Höder. ‘Were not the light gone from my eyes, gladly would I also do honor to Balder.’

“ ‘Nay, then, that thou shalt,’ said Loke. ‘Take thy bow and this dart; I will guide its flight for thee.’

“Höder did as he was bid, and down sank Balder lifeless to the ground.

“This was the greatest misfortune which had ever befallen the gods in Valhalla. For a space they stood horror-stricken, gazing at the corpse of the gentle god. Then the vaulted halls echoed to their cries of woe. Beyond all words was their grief and anguish. At length they bethought them to seek the author of the evil deed; but vengeance was beyond their power, for Odin's palace is a sanctuary. Moreover, Loke had vanished. With sighs and lamentations they bore the beloved dead to the

✻ THE DEATH OF BALDER ✻

seashore, where, drawn up on rollers, stood Balder's ship. On this his body was to be burned. But all the efforts of the gods were powerless to stir the mighty vessel from its place; whereupon they summoned the giantess Hyrrocken (Fire Whirlwind) to their aid. A rushing sound was heard as she came with streaming hair, riding a great wolf bridled with a serpent.

"Laying her mighty hands upon the ship she pushed it into the sea with such force that sparks flew from the rollers. Seized with rage and chagrin at this, Thor lifted his hammer to shatter the head of the witch, but the other gods hastened to pacify him, and then a fresh misfortune befell. The heart of Balder's blooming wife Nanna burst with its load of sorrow, and she sank lifeless into the arms of Frigga. The bodies of the youthful pair thus united by death were laid upon the funeral pyre that had been raised within the ship, and consumed amid the lamentations of all the gods. This is the story of Balder's death, which brought sorrow and mourning into Odin's halls of joy."

With rapture Ingeborg and Frithiof had listened to old Hilding's tale, while far in the distance they heard the rumbling of Thor's chariot, in which the

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

God of Thunder rides upon the clouds, and saw the flickering lights that follow the blows of his hammer. Tears glistened in Ingeborg's eyes, and even Frithiof's heart was moved. Presently they arose and turned their faces homeward. Ingeborg retired to her chamber, while Frithiof and Hilding seated themselves on cushions before a table upon which burned a taper.

Suddenly Frithiof spoke: "Terrible indeed must be the abode of the goddess Hel; yet gladly would I die and descend thither could I but know that Ingeborg would mourn for me as Nanna mourned for Balder!"

Hilding was amazed at this speech.

"Alas! my son," he said, "can it be that thou art cherishing a love for Ingeborg? Never can it bring thee happiness. Bethink thee! King Bele's ancestors are descended from the gods, while thou art but the son of a yeoman. From the sons of princes will Bele choose a son-in-law, nor mayst thou ever hope to wed his child."

Frithiof laughed and his eyes flashed as he answered, "The gods take no heed of rank. With them valor is all. They will spurn him who fails in courage, even though he be of their own blood; but him who strives with all his soul to imitate

✻ THE DEATH OF BALDER ✻

them in godlike deeds they will hold in honor. The fame I have already won for myself by slaying the beasts of the forest shall count as much for me as if my ancestral line stretched up to Odin's halls!"

"Alas for this love of thine!" cried Hilding. "I fear me't will bear thee naught but thorns. My old eyes were dim that I saw not what mischief was brewing."

"Nay, father, say not so!" answered Frithiof. "Never till this day have I thought to win Ingeborg for my wife. 'T is but now my heart hath revealed its yearnings for her and her alone in all the world. But I swear to thee by all the gods that never shall her image be banished thence. If need be, my sword shall be my wooer. Aye! I would contend for her with the Thunder-God himself; nor will I give her up so long as life shall last. Yet of this I will say naught to her father, but sue for her in due form after the manner of our forefathers."

As Frithiof thus spoke, Ingeborg sat in her chamber, her thoughts also busy with him. In his form she seemed to see the fair young god Balder, and prayed the gods to guard the noble youth and grant him fame and honor.

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have whispered many a counsel in my ear for thee, my son. As Odin's birds hover about the burial mound, so do the teachings of experience linger on the lips of age. This above all else lay thou to heart: honor the gods. From them alone spring all blessing and prosperity, even as it is they who send the storm-wind and the life-giving sun-rays. They gaze into the heart's most secret depths, whither no man's eye can penetrate. Avoid evil: long years must oft do penance for one hour's sin. Obey the King: one must be lord over all if the land would prosper; the night hath many lights; the day but one; willingly should the better man do homage to the best.

"One handle only hath the sword; he who grasps it elsewhere wounds his hand. Strength is a gift of the gods; but without judgment, force is of small avail. The bear has the strength of twelve men, yet he is slain by one. Against the sword-thrust hold the shield; against violence, the law. Guard thy heart from pride; few are moved to fear thereby, but all to hate. The more arrogant thou growest, the nearer is thy fall. Many have I seen soar high, who now must go on crutches. Praise not the day before its end, the mead before 't is drunk, nor the

✠ KING BELE AND THORSTEN ✠

counsel before 't is proved. Youth is prone to trust the lightest word; but battle tests the value of a blade, and friendship is tried by need.

"Trust neither the ice of a night nor the snows of Spring. It is true of all men that strength of body and mind must pass away, but the fame of an upright man lives on forever. Therefore, O my son, resolve only what is noble, do only what is right."

So spake the aged heroes, whose sage warnings are still passed from mouth to mouth in the Northland. They further charged their sons to perpetuate the friendship that had bound them together, through life, in weal and woe.

"Ever back to back we stood when danger threatened," said King Bele, "and if it came still closer, then with one shield we met it. Hold fast together as one man, ye three, and never shall the Northland see your overmatch; for strength bound to kingly rank and power is like the steel rim that encircles the shield of gold. Fail not to greet for me my fair rose Ingeborg, who in peace and quiet hath bloomed as becomes a royal maiden. Shield her well with brotherly love and loyalty, that no rude tempest bear away my tender flower. Be thou a father to her, Helge; guard her as your own

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

child, yet forget not that harsh constraint will oft revolt a noble heart, which by gentleness may easily be guided in the path of virtue and of custom. Let our weary bodies be laid to rest beneath two grave-mounds, on either side of the stream, that its rushing waters may chant for us eternal praises of the heroes. Oft at the midnight hour, when the pale moon sheds her silvery splendors and the cooling dews descend upon our mounds, shall thou and I, my Thorsten, discourse of olden days across the flood, and our voices will mingle with the murmuring of the waves. And now, dear sons, farewell! farewell! Leave us in peace, that far from the court we may prepare ourselves to enter into the glories of Valhalla."

Chapter IV

Frithiof's Inheritance

THE two aged heroes died as they had hoped, within a short time of each other, and were buried as King Bele had bidden, the two princes being declared joint heirs to the throne by decree of the people; while Frithiof took possession of his heritage, Framnäs. His lands were on the coast, and extended for three miles in each direction. Forests of birch crowned the mountain tops, whose slopes were covered with golden barley and waving rye, growing to the height of a man. Lakes teeming with fish mirrored the wooded heights. Through the forests, threaded with rushing streams, roamed noble stags, proud and stately as kings. On the rich meadows herds of cattle with sleek glossy hides cropped the green sward; while here and there roved flocks of sheep, like fleecy cloudlets slowly drifting across the blue vault of heaven. Ranged in two rows, twelve pairs of fiery coursers pawed impatiently in their stalls;

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

shod with shining steel were their hoofs, their manes knotted with red.

The great drinking-hall was so spacious that six hundred guests would scarcely fill it. Round the wall extended a table of polished oak, and on either side of the high-seat images of the gods were skilfully carved from elm wood, one representing the All-Father Odin, the other Frey, who rules over the rain and sunshine. Over the high-seat where Thorsten had sat for so many years a glossy black bear-skin, with scarlet jaws and the claws tipped with silver, was thrown. Midway of the hall was the great hearth of smoothly polished stone, whence the dancing flames shot ceaselessly upward; and suspended around the walls, helm and shield and sword glittered in the reflection of the blaze. Rich indeed was the dwelling: abundance everywhere met the eye, — crowded presses, well-filled cellars and store-rooms; while many a jewel, spoil of many a conquest, lay hidden in close-locked chests.

But the three most precious possessions of the house were famed throughout the land. Of these the first was a sword, called Angurvadel, or Brother of Lightning. Forged by dwarfs in some far Eastern land, Frithiof's ancestors had wrought with it many

✻ FRITHIOF'S INHERITANCE ✻

heroic deeds. The hilt was of hammered gold, and the blade was covered with strange runes, the meaning of which was unknown save to those who forged it in the distant Orient. When Frithiof drew it from the sheath, it flashed like the lightning or the streaming Northern Lights. Moreover, a magic power belonged to this wondrous heirloom : so long as peace ruled the land the runes on the blade gleamed dull and pale, but when war prevailed they burned red as the comb of a fighting cock.

Next to this sword in renown was an arm-ring of pure gold, the work of halting Vanlund, the Vulcan of the North. Graved on it were the names of the holy gods and their castles, with the signs of the changing seasons, while crowning the circlet, as the sun crowns the heavens, was a splendid ruby. This ring had long been an heirloom of the house and had once been stolen by the robber Sote, who roved the seas pillaging and destroying. News came at last to Thorsten that Sote had caused himself to be buried with all his treasures in a walled-up mound on the shores of Britain ; yet there his spirit found no rest, but haunted the place as a spectre. Forthwith Thorsten resolved to seek this ghostly visitant, and with Bele, who offered to accompany him, took ship and

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

sailed away to the shore of Britain, where they soon found Sote's place of burial. Like a sunken palace was the grave-mound, over which lay piled up vast heaps of earth and ruined stonework. Thorsten and Bele peered through a chink of the doorway into the vaulted depths. There stood the black viking ship, and high up on the mast squatted a grisly shape wrapped in a blue flaming mantle, its staring eyeballs rolling, while it vainly endeavored to scour the blood stains from a rusty sword. All about lay heaps of gold, and on the arm of the phantom gleamed Thorsten's precious heirloom, the stolen arm-ring.

Bele whispered to Thorsten, "Let us go down together and fight with this fiery spectre!"

But half angrily Thorsten answered, "Nay, one against one was the custom of our fathers; alone will I strive with it."

Long they contended as to which should first encounter that ghastly foe, but the lot fell to Thorsten. One blow of his spear burst in the door, and he descended into the vault, while, shield before him and sword in hand, King Bele listened without. Wild chantings he heard at first, like some magic spell, then loud clashing sounds, as of swords crossed in



FRITHIOF'S INHERITANCE



conflict. Then came a horrible scream, followed by instant silence, and out staggered Thorsten, pale and distraught; but on his arm he bore the ring. Never in after days would he relate what had passed in those awful depths, and when questioned would turn away shuddering. But he was often wont to say, "Truly, 'twas dearly bought, this arm-ring. But once in my life have I trembled, and that was when I took it!"

Last of the three family treasures was the good ship "Ellida." Frithiof's ancestor, Wiking, so it was said, returning once from a foray, discovered on his own shores a shipwrecked man. Tall he looked and nobly formed, with an open countenance, whose expression was constantly changing like the glancing of waves in the sunlight. Sea-green floated his hair, white as wave-foam his beard. A blue mantle enveloped his form, and the golden belt he wore was set with corals. Steering directly to the spot, Wiking rescued the unfortunate, took him to his home, and feasted him right nobly. But when at night the stranger was offered a bed he shook his head, smiling:

"Fair is the wind and my ship a good one," he said, "and many a mile I hope to leave behind me

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

ere the break of day. Naught but thanks have I to offer thee in return for thy hospitality, for my wealth lies deep beneath the ocean wave. Yet in the morning it may be thou wilt find some gift from me upon the shore."

At daybreak Wiking hastened to the shore, and lo! with the swiftness of the sea-eagle darting upon its prey there came flying into the haven one of the warships commonly known as dragons. Not a soul was to be seen on board, neither steersman nor rowers; yet unerringly the rudder guided its winding course amid rocks and shoals. As it neared the land, the sails furled themselves, the anchor fell, and the slender vessel rested quietly upon the sandy beach. As Wiking stood gazing in astonishment at all this, voices sounded from the dancing waves. They chanted:

The man thou didst rescue and shelter
Was Ægir, the lord of the sea;
He forgets not his 'debt. See — yon dragon
He sendeth as token to thee.

Royal, indeed, was the gift of the sea-god. The solid beams of the ship were not joined in the usual way, but grown together. Long and dragon-shaped it lay upon the water, the head reared high, wide



FRITHIOF'S INHERITANCE



jaws gleaming red with gold, the body speckled with blue and gold, and ending at the rudder in a coiling tail covered with silver scales. Black were the sails, with edgings of gold, and when each was full stretched, the ship flew like the storm wind, swifter than the sea-eagle.

With all these treasures and more besides, Frithiof, next to the two kings, was the richest man in all the land. Kingly of nature was he, if not by birth, and gentle and noble in word and deed. Twelve mighty champions had he ever beside him, tried comrades of his dead father. Among these graybeards, like a rose set in a wreath of withered leaves, was a youth called Björn, joyous as a child, yet with the strength of manhood and the wisdom of age. Frithiof had grown up with him, and together they had sworn blood-brotherhood.

Sorrowfully amid these heroes sat Frithiof in the high-seat draining the mead horn at his father's grave-feast, after the custom of his ancestors, while with a heavy heart he listened to the thundering hero-songs sounded in praise of the departed.

Chapter V

Frithiof's Wooing

EACH day the great hall echoed to the sound of harpstrings and rang with praises of the great deeds of his sires, but naught could rouse Frithiof from his melancholy. Once more the Spring awoke with smiles; the blue sea was flecked with swelling sails of ships, and still his gloom remained unbroken. His thoughts ever dwelt on the happy days at Hilding's abode, when the King's child was his beloved companion.

At last Björn went to him and said: "Why does Frithiof sit like a wounded eagle in its eyrie? What is amiss with thee, my friend? Surely thou hast no lack of lands or goods; song and harp sound for thee by night and day; the mead horn passes from hand to hand. But vainly thy good steed stamps in his stall; vainly the hooded falcon screams for prey. See how 'Ellida' strains at her cable and spreads her wings, impatient to be free!"

❖ FRITHIOF'S WOOING ❖

Then Frithiof clasped his friend's hand and, shaking off his sorrow, embarked with his comrades in the dragon, which was soon speeding onward through the foaming waves.

Helge and Halfdan were sitting on their father's grave-mound near the sea, holding judgment for the people, when "Ellida" approached. Frithiof landed with his men and, entering the circle of warriors, thus addressed the two kings:

"I stand here before ye, O Kings! as suitor for the hand of Ingeborg. Surely your dead father would have smiled upon our union, since 't was by his wish that we grew up together under Hilding's guidance, like two saplings with branches intertwined, whose tops Frigga winds about with silver thread. Of no royal race am I, 't is true, but the fame of my sires is oft times sung in royal halls, as well ye know. Easily might I win for myself a kingdom and wear the golden circlet on my brow; but 't is my choice rather to dwell in the land of my birth, my sword ever ready to defend the throne or the hut of the poor. On King Bele's mound we stand; in the depths below he heareth and speaketh for me — 'Join ye the hands of Frithiof and-Ingeborg!'"

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

Frowning darkly, Helge rose and scornfully replied: "Not for a peasant's son is our sister destined; none but a prince may hope to win her. Thou art called the mightiest hero in all the Northland; let that content thy pride, and aspire not to the hand of a maiden whose forefathers sprung from Odin himself. My kingdom needs not thy service; that shall be our own care. But if thou wouldst have a place at court among my hired warriors, that I will not deny thee."

Frithiof laughed grimly. "I, be thy vassal? Nay—I am a man for myself, even as was my father. Out, Angurvadel, from thy sheath!"

Bright flashed the blade in the sunlight, the runes glowing fiery red. "Now, Angurvadel, let us see if any shall deny that thou at least art high-born and noble! As for thee, King Helge, stood we not upon this sacred mound, I would smite thee to the dust! Take heed, hereafter, that thou come not too near my blade!"

With one blow Frithiof clove in twain Helge's golden shield, that hung upon an oak tree, and the two halves fell with a crash that awakened hollow echoes from the vault below.

'Well struck, my sword!' cried Frithiof; "hide



FRITHIOF'S wooing

✻ FRITHIOF'S WOOING ✻

now thy gleam and dream thou of exploits more noble!"

Terror seized Helge and his followers, and all looked on silently while Frithiof returned to his ship and was borne swiftly away over the water out to the deep blue sea.

Chapter VI

King Ring

THESE reigned at this time in the far North a King named Ring, no longer young, but gentle and kindly as Balder himself, and sage as Mimir, who guards the fount of Wisdom. His realm was peaceful as a grove of the gods. The greenwood never echoed to the clash of arms, nor were the cornfields trampled by the hoofs of battle steeds. Justice held sway upon the Seat of Judgment about which the people gathered to hold their Ting, or general assembly, where each man had a voice in the affairs of the kingdom. Thither came many a white-sailed vessel, bringing treasures from a hundred coasts, in exchange for the country's rich abundance. Wisely and well had King Ring guided the destinies of his people for more than thirty years, and prayers for his welfare ascended daily to Odin's throne.

One day the King sat with his warriors in the royal hall. Long was the feast, and many a horn



of foaming mead was drained ; but at last he pushed back his gold chair from the board, while all the chiefs arose to do honor to the words of their lord. Sighing deeply, he began :

“ My noble Queen was taken, as ye know, from out these mists of earth, and now in Frigga’s heavenly bower sits enthroned in purple robes. Naught remains to me but the flower-decked grave-mound where she lies. She was the treasure of my life. But my babes suffer for a mother’s care ; the country lacks a queen. King Bele, who was often wont to be our honored guest, now also shares Valhalla’s joys ; but he hath left a daughter, as fair, they say, as the lily and the rose in one, and her I choose to be my spouse. ’T is true that she is young and like the Spring, while Winter’s frost has touched my locks with gray ; but if it so be that she can trust an upright heart and nourish affection for helpless childhood in her breast, then will Autumn offer to the Spring its throne. Take gold from the vault-rooms, therefore, and gems and costly apparel from the chests, and go ye to Ingeborg’s brothers with my suit. Also let minstrels accompany you, that they may assist your wooing with song and harpstring.”

A band of chosen warriors set out without delay



and, reaching the Court of King Bele's sons, made known their errand. Three days they waited for an answer, while Helge, instead of taking wise counsel on the matter, offered up horses and falcons on the sacrificial stone and searched the entrails to discover the will of the gods. But on the fourth day, Ring's messengers demanded an answer; whereupon Helge, deluded by the signs he had perceived, curtly rejected the monarch's suit and the giddy Halfdan added jestingly :

"'T is pity our feastings must have an end ! Had King Graybeard but come hither with you, truly I myself would now have aided him to mount his horse !"

Suppressing their wrath, the envoys returned to their master with King Helge's answer ; nor did they fail to relate the affront that had been offered them by Halfdan.

"An evil hour shall it be for them, that sees King Graybeard on their shores !" cried Ring, as he smote the great war-shield that hung upon a linden tree in the castle courtyard. Swift throughout the land sped the summons to war, and soon a host of warriors had assembled. The haven was filled with dragon ships, and countless helm-plumes nodded in the breeze.



KING RING



When the message of war reached King Helge, he was seized with fear, and hastily despatched his sister Ingeborg to Balder's temple, which was held sacred all over the Northland. None had ever dared to violate this sanctuary, and there he deemed her safe from King Ring and his warriors.

Chapter VII

Frithiof at Chess

FRITHIOF was sitting with Björn in his hall at Framnäs before a splendid chessboard, the squares of which were alternate gold and silver, when Hilding entered. Greeting the old man kindly, Frithiof led him to the high-seat and bade him refresh himself with á horn of mead till he and his adroit adversary should have finished their match. But without waiting, Hilding began:

“I come on behalf of the two princes, Helge and Halfdan, to pray you to make peace with them. King Ring has declared war and they fear for the kingdom.”

“Take heed, Björn,” cried Frithiof, “thy King is in danger! A pawn, indeed, may save him; pawns are lightly sacrificed!”

Hilding, who well understood the double meaning of these words, continued:

“Let not thine anger master thee, my son! Against King Ring the princes may be weak; against thy single arm ’t were otherwise.”

✻ FRITHIOF AT CHESS ✻

Frithiof smiled.

"So thou dost threaten my castle, Björn!" he said. "But rest thee assured it will be well guarded."

"In Balder's Grove," began Hilding once more, "Ingeborg doth weep the whole day long. Will not even her prayers move thee?"

"Ha! Björn, wouldst thou attack the Queen, dearer to me than life from childhood's hour? The most precious piece in all the game is she, and her I will save, cost what it may!"

"Wilt thou give me no answer, nor yet end thy game?" asked Hilding, indignantly.

Then Frithiof arose, and grasping his old master's hand, said earnestly: Nay, be not angry with me, father, but hearken to my firm resolve. Say to Bele's sons that never will he whose honor they have tarnished be their vassal."

Hilding was silent for a space before he replied: "I must e'en perform my duty; yet neither can I blame thee for thy resolution. Odin will guide all for the best!"

Then mounting his horse, he rode thoughtfully away.

Chapter VIII

Frithiof goes to Ingeborg

WHEN the sun had sunk low in the west, Frithiof said to Björn: "Let us away, for this night I must speak with Ingeborg."

"How!" cried his friend, "wouldst thou violate Balder's Grove?"

"Surely 'twill be no violation of Balder's sanctuary if I do but seek in all honor and propriety to hold converse with the King's daughter, my play-fellow and companion from our infancy!"

Björn said no more, and "Ellida" soon brought them to the holy grove, one side of which was bounded by the sea. By that way it was forbidden to enter, under penalty of death, while from the land none but the priests might grant entrance through the door in the high wall to those wishing to visit the grove and temple. Paying no heed to this prohibition, Frithiof boldly entered the grove from the shore and suddenly appeared before Ingeborg, to her mingled joy and terror.

✻ FRITHIOF GOES TO INGEBORG ✻

“Fear not, dear Ingeborg,” he cried, clasping her hand, “that my presence here will profane Balder’s sanctuary. Nay, rather let us go into the temple and implore his aid and guidance.”

In silence the lovers entered the temple, and not till the dawn began to break did they emerge and seek the shore once more.

“Now have we plighted our troth before the gentle god,” said Frithiof, “and our love for each other shall therefore be publicly made known.”

Thereupon the maiden besought Frithiof to forget what had passed and be reconciled to her brother.

“Thy words accord with that which Balder hath implanted in my breast, fair maid,” replied Frithiof, “wherefore I will appear at the Ting and before all men offer to thy brother Helge the hand of peace. Soon shalt thou hear thereof.”

And with these words they parted.

Chapter IX

The Parting

OFT the next day did Ingeborg turn her footsteps toward the sea, and at last as she neared the wooded shore once more, the sails of the swiftly approaching dragon glimmered through the branches of the trees. It stopped, and Frithiof leaped lightly ashore.

“Welcome indeed art thou, Frithiof!” said Ingeborg; “but woe is me! I read my fate upon thy brow.”

“Seest thou not also blood-red runes thereon, bespeaking insult, shame, and banishment?”

“Nay, calm thyself, and tell me quickly what has passed.”

“Learn, then, my Ingeborg, the disgrace that I am forced to bear! I sought the assembly of the people gathered at thy father’s grave-mound, where, close circling, stood the Northland’s warriors, sword in hand and shield to shield. Within their ranks upon the Judgment seat, sat that pale blood-man

✻ THE PARTING ✻

Helge, his gloomy gaze fast fixed upon the ground, while beside him Halfdan, like some overgrown child, toyed idly with a slender sword.

“Then I stepped forth and spoke: ‘The clouds of war, O Helge, overhang thy boundaries. Thy kingdom is in jeopardy; but give me thy sister, and I’ll lend my arm, whose strength shall stand thee well in time of need. Forgotten be our grudge, for loath am I to cherish hate against the brother of my Ingeborg. Be just, O King! and save at once thy country and thy sister’s heart! As proof of faith I offer thee my hand in peace; but by the mighty Thor I swear that never again shall it be stretched to thee in reconciliation!’

“Loud plaudits rang from all about us; the clang of a thousand shields rose up to heaven. ‘Yea, give him Ingeborg!’ they shouted, ‘the fairest lily in our vales! Remember, King, that Frithiof is our stoutest swordsman. Give him thy sister!’

“Thereat our noble foster-father, Hilding, stepped from out the throng and spoke for me. From his lips fell many a weighty speech and biting proverb, while even Halfdan, too, did urge consent. But vain were my words, vain the shouts of the warriors, vain the intercession of Hilding and Halfdan! As little



might the Spring sun coax a blade of grass from out the naked rock as our united prayers awake one kindly thought in Helge's breast. Unchanged his lowering glance as scornfully he spoke :

“ ‘The peasant's son might claim, perchance, our sister : but never shall the defiler of a temple win her hand. Speak, Frithiof ! Hast thou not broken Balder's peace ? Hast thou not forced thy way into his holy temple, despite the law which so forbids ? Answer yea or nay ! ’

“ ‘My life's happiness,’ I answered, ‘hangs upon a word. Yet fear not, Helge ; neither for Valhalla's joys nor all this earth's delights would I forswear myself. Yea ; in Balder's temple I have seen thy sister, but in no wise did I offend the pure and gentle god. Our prayers to him did waken holy thoughts within our hearts and led me here to offer peace to thee.’

“ More I could not speak, for a murmur of horror ran through the circle ; the warriors, paled by superstition, drew back from me as I were smitten with the plague ; thy brother's was the victory.

“ At last he spoke : ‘By the laws of our fathers, mine is the right to sentence thee to banishment or death : but rather will I emulate in mildness that

✻ THE PARTING ✻

god whose sanctuary thou hast violated. Harken then to my decree. Far to the westward lies a group of islands ruled by Augantyr. King Bele long ago did lay him under tribute, and this he faithfully remitted so long as our royal father was alive. Since Bele's death he has refused it. Go thou and collect this tribute, as atonement for thy crime !'

"Then he added sneeringly: 'T is said this Augantyr is hard-handed and sits brooding o'er his gold like Fafner, the famed dragon slain by Sigurd. But who could withstand our second Sigurd's prowess? Truly this is far other work than seeking maids in Balder's holy grove! Here till the Summer comes again we'll wait for thy return, bringing fresh glory and — above all else — the tribute! But shouldst thou fail in this — thou shalt be doomed as coward, branded and banished forever from thy native land!"

"So ended his words; the assembly was dissolved, and the warriors dispersed in silence."

"But what is now thy purpose, Frithiof?"

"Have I a choice? This very day I depart to redeem my honor."

"And leave me here?"

"Nay, come with me, my Ingeborg!"

"Alas! that may not be."

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

"Yet hear me, beloved, ere thou dost fix thy firm resolve. Thy brother in his wisdom forgets that Augantyr was once my father's friend as well as Bele's. Perchance he'll yield with good-will what I ask; but should he not, this friend I carry at my side shall prove a sharp and powerful persuader. Then will I send to King Helge the gold he so desireth and free us both forever from the sacrificial knife of that crowned hypocrite; then we, my Ingeborg, will seek some distant happier land, and bid farewell to shores so hostile to our happiness. Look, my 'Ellida' doth already spread her eagle's wings to bear us swiftly o'er the waves! Come, beloved, haste thee!"

"Alas! alas! I cannot follow."

"What hinders thee, my Ingeborg? Were thy good father but alive, and did he —"

"Forget not, Frithiof, that Helge holds my father's place with me. The gods have blessed and woven these bonds, and a woman dare not break them to steal her happiness, however near it lies."

"Once more consider. Is this word thy last?"

"Alas! dear Frithiof, I cannot, dare not do else, if I would maintain my honor and thy own."

✻ THE PARTING ✻

“Then fare thee well, King Helge’s sister — fare thee well!”

“O Frithiof, Frithiof, is it thus thou wouldst depart — without a glance, without a hand-clasp for thy childhood’s friend? Methinks one who is forced to sacrifice as much as I, doth well deserve at least a word of comfort. The stir of life and clash of arms will ease thy grief, but what remains for me? To whom, alas! may I impart my woe? Within my bower I’ll sit, thinking of thee and weaving broken lilies in my web, till Spring herself with fairer lilies shall adorn my grave.”

“Cease! cease!” cried Frithiof with deep emotion, as he clasped the maiden’s hand. “Forgive me that my sorrow did assume the garb of anger. Thou art right. I see it now, my better angel. ’Tis true that only noble minds can teach us what is noble, and thy pure heart was quicker far to see the right than mine. Alone I’ll go, and part from thee — but never from my hope, whate’er betide! Next Spring shall Helge see me here again, the crime with which he charges me atoned. Then in full circle of the warriors, ’mid glittering steel will I demand thee from thy brother as my wife. Till then farewell, and keep me ever in thy thoughts.

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

In memory of our childhood's love take thou this arm-ring, a treasured heirloom of my father's house: all the wonders of the heavens are carved upon it—but the world's best wonder is a faithful heart. See! how it gleams on thy white arm like a glow-worm upon a lily's stem!"

Thus they parted, and "Ellida" bore the hero swiftly away, while Ingeborg, sad and hopeless, betook her to her bower.

Chapter X

Frithiof's Voyage

COLD blew the wind; day by day the skies darkened; deck and mast, sail and rudder were covered thick with ice and frost. Frithiof was already far from his native shores when suddenly black storm clouds overspread the heavens and a fearful tempest arose. The sea was stirred to its depths; waves mountain-high threatened to engulf the ship, which tossed helplessly amid the boiling surges. But Frithiof exulted in the fury of the elements; the wild scene upon which he gazed was but a reflection of the storm that raged within his breast. Still the tempest increased; showers of hailstones rattled down upon the deck and on the numbed hands of the warriors at the helm. A gust of wind tore away the cordage; planks and timbers groaned and creaked; huge billows swept the deck; and higher and higher rose the water in the hold despite all the efforts of

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

the ship's people, who now gave themselves up for lost. Even to Frithiof it seemed death was nigh.

"It is Helge that hath sent this storm upon us," said one, "and who may withstand witchcraft?"

"Look!" cried another, "yonder swims a whale and bears on its back two sea-fiends! One is wrapped in the hide of the ice-bear; the other hath the shape of a sea-eagle, with black wings flapping. Woe unto us! 't is the sea trolls, Heid and Ham! We are lost!" But Frithiof, summoning his friend Björn to take the helm, hastened to reassure the terror-stricken crew. His words put fresh courage in their hearts, and with redoubled strength they began once more to struggle against the fury of the storm.

"Courage, friends!" he shouted; "those who trust in the gods are safe from the power of evil spirits." Then, springing to the ship's prow, he chanted :

Now "Ellida," show us
Whether, as 't is boasted,
Hero-wood thy bosom holds!
Listen! Art thou truly
Ægir's God-sprung daughter?
Dash with thy strong keel, and
Cleave yon spell-charmed whale!

✧ FRITHIOF'S VOYAGE ✧

With one bound the dragon clove the Troll-whale's body, and down it sank beneath the waves.

Then, at once, the Hero hurleth
Two sharp spears; the ice-bear's hide
Pierceth one — the other springeth
Through the pitch-black eagle's side !

Instantly the storm subsided. The sun broke through the clouds and the waves no longer swept the deck. Soon the sea was as smooth as glass, and there before them lay the islands ruled by Augantyr. But the weary rowers could no longer move their arms, the warriors were forced to lean for support upon their swords. When the ship touched land, Björn carried four and Frithiof eight of the exhausted men ashore. Food and drink were then brought from the ship, and all refreshed themselves with a hearty meal.

Chapter XI

Frithiof at the Court of Augantyr

IN his great hall near the sea sat Augantyr at wassail with his champions, while outside the window Halvar kept watch. A good swordsman and stout drinker was he, and often as his horn was empty he silently thrust it through the lattice to be refilled. Suddenly he flung it far into the hall and shouted: "I see a ship making to land! On it pale warriors totter helplessly about; but so strong and fresh are two of them that they carry the others to the shore."

Augantyr strode to the window and gazed out toward the sea. Then he said: "That, methinks, hath the look of 'Ellida,' Thorsten's dragon ship, and in one of yonder two stout warriors I seem to see old Thorsten's form and bearing. Hath he not the air of a prince of all the land?"

When the black-bearded Atle heard this, the Berserk fury seized him. He sprang from the board with eyes rolling and shouted — "If this be

✻ FRITHIOF AT COURT ✻

Frithiof, now will I prove the truth of what is said, that he hath power to render harmless every blade, and never is the first to sue for peace." He rushed from the hall, followed by twelve of the warriors. Hewing and thrusting furiously at the air with their swords, they stormed down to the shore, where Frithiof had built a fire to cheer his men. From afar, Atle shouted :

"Easy were it now for me to slay thee ; but rather shalt thou have thy choice — to do battle with me here, or fly. But if thou wilt yield and sue for peace, then in friendly guise I'll lead thee to our lord."

"Is it your custom thus to welcome toil-worn heroes cast upon your shores?" was Frithiof's answer. "Then listen ! Spent as I am with days of hardship and distress, yet never will I sue for peace from thee"; and therewith he drew his sword, the runes on the blade growing red as fire. Fast and furious fell the sword-strokes. Both shields at the same moment dropped, riven in twain, upon the ground ; yet fearlessly the champions fought on. At last down swept Angurvadel with resistless force, and loudly clanging Atle's blade was shattered.

Frithiof stepped back, saying, "Swordless I will

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

not slay thee; but if thou wouldst not yet have peace then let us try a wrestling contest."

Foaming with rage, Atle sprang at him and a fearful struggle began. Like two eagles seizing on their prey, they grappled with each other. The earth shook with the trampling of their feet. It seemed as if the heaving of their breasts would burst the encasing mail, while in awe their comrades stood about them waiting for the issue of the contest. At length Thorsten's mighty son succeeded in throwing his adversary, and, kneeling on his breast, he cried:

"Were but my sword within my grasp, its blade e'er now had pierced thee through, thou swarthy Berserk!"

"Go, then, and fetch it — I will lie here the while," said Atle proudly. "All brave men to Valhalla's halls must wend at last — I to-day and thou to-morrow."

Still filled with the rage of battle, Frithiof with one bound reached his sword and was about to despatch his prostrate foe, who moved not, but lay calmly gazing upward, when he suddenly relented and, dropping his sword, held out his hand to the vanquished Atle. Just then Halvar came hurrying thither waving a white wand and crying:



FRITHIOF'S course

✻ FRITHIOF AT COURT ✻

“Cease, cease your furious strife! The savory viands that await ye grow cold in their silver dishes, and my thirst doth press me sore.”

Therewith the two heroes who but now had striven in deadly combat together sought the court of Augantyr in peace.

The appearance of the great hall filled Frithiof with astonishment. In place of the usual oaken planks the walls were covered with gilded leather adorned with flowering vines. The chimney was of marble; tapers in silver candlesticks illuminated the halls; the doors were held fast with locks. A bountiful meal stood ready spread in heavy silver dishes, and near the high-seat a roasted stag adorned the board, the horns entwined with leaves, the hoofs gilded. On the high-seat of silver sat Augantyr, clad in helm and mail of glittering steel, inlaid with gold, a purple mantel sown with silver stars depending from his shoulders. He arose as Frithiof entered, and advanced to meet his guest, saying:

“Full many a horn have I drained in Thorsten’s company, and glad am I to do fitting honor to his valiant son.”

Then leading him to a place beside him on the high-seat, he called on all his warriors to fill their

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

horns and beakers and drink to Thorsten's memory, while the hall rang to the sound of harps, as minstrels praised that hero's glorious deeds.

Meanwhile Augantyr questioned his guest concerning matters in the Northland; and in well-chosen words, avoiding either praise or blame, Frithiof related all that had passed, concluding with his voyage and the terrible sea witches against whose power they had been forced to contend. So eloquently did he describe their adventures that Augantyr listened with approving smiles, and the bold champions about the board often interrupted the speaker with their shouts. Then Augantyr inquired the purpose of his voyage, and Frithiof told him frankly of his love for Ingeborg, of Helge's arrogance, and the penance that had been laid upon him.

"For this have I come," he concluded, "to demand of thee in behalf of Kings Helge and Halfdan, the tribute thou wast wont to pay in Bele's lifetime."

Calmly Augantyr replied: "Never have I owned another as my lord. Free do I live; free also are my people about these seas. What I sent Bele was not enforced, but given in friendship. His sons I know not. If they would have tribute from me, let them demand it with the sword — then shall they

✻ FRITHIOF AT COURT ✻

have the best of answers! Yet thy father was my friend."

He beckoned to his daughter, who sat near him on a golden stool, and she hastened to the women's chamber, soon returning with a purse whereon was worked with rare skill a green forest scene — animals of gold wandered beneath the trees, and above shone a silver moon. The tassels were strung with costly pearls, the clasp enriched with rubies. Augantyr took this purse, filled it to the brim with pieces of gold, and handed it to his guest, saying, "Take this as a gift of welcome, son of Thorsten, and do with it as thou wilt; but as for claim, I refuse to acknowledge any such. Hear now my wish: tarry thou here till Spring comes, as my honored guest. Courage and boldness stand thee well in time of danger, it is true, yet think not thine 'Ellida' may withstand all the perils of the stormy season. And remember there are demons in the sea more mighty yet than those which thou didst vanquish."

To this Frithiof gladly agreed, and he held out his hand to his hospitable host, saying: "Be it, then, as thou wilt!"

Chapter XII

Frithiof's Return

THE winter passed, and again were hill and valley, grove and forest, clothed with bloom and verdure. Then Frithiof thanked his host, and, bidding him farewell, was soon speeding joyously away across the foaming main. Six times the sun rose and set, and the seventh morning found him near his journey's end. Consumed with longing, Frithiof rose early and mounted to the deck. There, veiled in the mists of dawn, he saw his native shores and heard the familiar rushing of its mountain streams. Light as a bird flew "Ellida" o'er the dancing waves and in her swelling sails the western breezes sang like nightingales. Just as the first ray of sunlight fell on land and sea they entered the well-known haven.

"Past the green birch woods now," cried Frithiof to Björn, "and Framnäs greets me!"

With beating heart and gleaming eyes he waited — but what is this? Is he bewitched? There lies the



FRITHIOF'S RETURN



open space where his forefathers built their dwelling, yet naught is to be seen of it. Do his eyes deceive him? He rubs them and looks again at the familiar spot; but neither house nor building of any kind is there, only a tall blackened chimney stands out dark against the sky. Looking closer, where Framnäs stood, he sees a great pile of ruins, from which the ashes whirl aloft.

“Ellida’s” anchor is dropped, and silently Frithiof approaches the scene of devastation. Stones and charred beams are strewn around or heaped together in confusion; fruit trees stretch forth their shrivelled branches; about the levelled grave-mounds lie the bones of heroes. As Frithiof stands spellbound amid the desolation, his faithful hound Bran comes bounding to meet him. Yelping with joy he leaps upon his master, while out from the dale trots a milk-white courser, neighing and tossing his gold-knotted mane. Frithiof stroked the dog’s head and patted his favorite’s glossy neck; but the shadow on his brow remained unaltered. Then he saw Hilding, his aged foster-father coming toward him with mournful look.

“Welcome, father, to the ruins of Framnäs!” he cried, and then added bitterly: “But why should

this sight surprise me? 'T is when the eagle is flown that boys plunder his nest. So thus doth King Helge guard the hut of the peasant; thus he keeps his royal oath! Rage at his dastardly act more moves me than grief for what is lost. But tell me first of all, good father, where is Ingeborg?"

"Alas! my son," replied Hilding, "I fear my tidings will but aggravate thy woe, yet listen to what has passed. Scarce wert thou gone when King Ring invaded the country, his force outnumbering ours full five to one. In the Disardale we met, and bloody was the battle. The waters of the stream ran red with gore. Halfdan, as ever, laughed and jested; but so bravely did he bear him, my heart was gladdened at the sight, and twice did my shield protect him from a death-stroke. The victory might even have been ours, had not King Helge, seized with panic, fled; whereat the people's courage, too, forsook them, and, flinging down their arms, they scattered far and wide. But in his flight King Helge paused to fire thy house. Ring then demanded of the brothers lands and crown, or that they yield him up their sister's hand. Messengers went often to and fro, and in the end King Ring bore Ingeborg homeward as his Queen."

✻ FRITHIOF'S RETURN ✻

Frithiof laughed wildly : " Who now," he cried, " dare talk to me of woman's truth, since she whom I deemed true as Nanna's self hath proven faithless? Hereafter naught but hate for mankind shall my bosom harbor ; henceforth the seas shall have their fill of blood, for none who cross my path shall Angurvadel spare ! "

" Nay, son," said Hilding sorrowfully, " abate thy wrath, nor seek to revenge thy wrongs upon the innocent. Rather accuse the Norns, whose doom on thee hath fallen. What Ingeborg doth suffer I alone can tell. Before all others her despair was dumb as is the turtle dove that mourns her mate. So doth the sea fowl, pierced by death's arrow, sink beneath the waves, in those cool depths to pour away her life. ' Atonement ' — so she spake — ' hath been decreed by Balder for Frithiof's violation of his holy place ; nor may I, faint-hearted, seek to shun the sacrifice. To death he dooms me, not swift, — ah ! that were easy, — but lingering — slow, to waste away with grief. To that decree I yield. Reveal to no one what I suffer. I desire pity from none. But be thou the bearer of my last farewell to Frithiof. '

" At last the wedding day was come (Oh, would

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

that evil day had never dawned !); to Balder's temple walked a train of white-robed maidens, led by a bard whose mournful chant moved every heart to woe. Amid them, on a coal-black steed rode Ingeborg, like that pale spirit which surmounts the thunder cloud. Before the doors of the temple I lifted my lily from her saddle and led her to the altar. With unfaltering tongue she spoke her vows; but unto Balder then she prayed in such heart-rending tones that every eye save hers was filled with tears. Then for the first time Helge marked the ring she wore. With a furious glance he tore it from her and placed thy gift upon the arm of Balder. But thereat I could no longer suppress my rage, and, snatching my sword from out its sheath, approached the King as he stood before the image of the god. Of as little worth was he to me at that moment as the lowest of his people, and verily a crime would have been committed in that sacred place had not a whisper reached my ears from Ingeborg.

“Nay, stay thy hand. Stain not thy spotless blade! My brother might indeed have spared me this; but much a heart can suffer ere it break, and the All-Father shall one day judge between us!”

✻ FRITHIOF'S RETURN ✻

“Ay, Ingeborg,” cried Frithiof, “thou speakest truly — the All-Father will one day judge between us! But he also metes out justice here below by mortal hand, and ’tis in my heart that I am hither led to be the judge of one. Is not to-day the Midsummer feast of Balder, that Helge celebrates within his temple? Now, crowned priest, thou who hast sold thy sister, thou who hast robbed me of my bride, behold to-day thy judge!”

Chapter XIII

The Burning of the Temple

IT was midnight. Low across the mountains burned the blood-red sun, which in far northern Scandinavia never sets on the longest day of the year. Neither day nor night was it—an awful twilight reigned. Within the temple Balder's great feast was being celebrated. High in the air shot the flames from the sacred hearthstone, while pale, white-bearded priests raked the brands till showers of crackling sparks flew upward. Clad in his royal robes, Helge presided at the altar.

Suddenly the clash of arms sounded without, and a voice was heard: "Björn, hold fast the door! Let none escape! If any strive by force to pass thee, cleave his skull!" Helge grew deadly pale; he knew that voice too well. Then in strode Frithiof and addressed him:

"Here is the tribute thou didst order me to bring thee from Augantyr. Take it! And now, for life or death we'll strive before this altar. One of us twain must burn on Balder's pyre. Shieldless we'll

✻ BURNING OF THE TEMPLE ✻

fight and thou, as befits a King, shalt have first stroke. But beware, I say, for I strike second. Nay—gaze not fearfully about, nor seek escape, King Fox! Caught in thy hole art thou at last. Remember Framnäs that thou didst lay waste, and think of Ingeborg's cheeks, blanched by thee!"

Beside himself with-fury, Frithiof tore the heavy purse of gold from his belt and hurled it at the head of the King, who straightway sank swooning on the altar steps, blood gushing from his mouth and nose.

"What! canst thou not bear the weight of thine own gold?" shouted Frithiof. "Shame! shame! thou coward King! Truly my sword is far too noble for thee, nor shall it taste of blood so base as thine. Silence, ye pale priests of moonlight, nor dare to lift your sacrificial knives! Back, back, I say, for thirsty grows my blade!"

He lifted his eyes to the image of Balder. "Thou shining god, frown not so darkly on me!" Then, perceiving the arm-ring he had given to Ingeborg, his anger blazed up fiercer than before.

"Nay—by thy leave," he cried; "that ring came not in lawful fashion on thy arm! Not for thee did

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

Vaulund forge its wonders; and he who is its master claims his own."

He pulled at the ring, but it seemed grown fast to Balder's arm. Putting forth all his strength, at last he tore it loose; but therewith down crashed the image of the god into the fire below. Higher and higher leaped the flames, till beam and rafter kindled. Horror-stricken, Frithiof stood for a moment motionless; then turning to the door, he shouted:

"Open, Björn! Let all depart! The feast is over. The temple blazes; bring water! Hasten, all, to quench the flames!"

Quickly a chain of men to the sea is formed. From hand to hand the buckets fly, while high up among the rafters stands Frithiof, calm amid the mounting flames, and directs his comrades. But vain are all their efforts. The golden plates of the roof melt and drop down into the fiery sands.

"All is lost!" shout the people. "See the red fire-cock, how he stands upon the roof-tree and ever wider spreads his glowing wings!"

A strong wind arose and whirled the flaming brands into the treetops, dry from the summer

✻ BURNING OF THE TEMPLE ✻

heats. Raging from branch to branch it leaped, and soon the whole grove was one sea of fire. When morning broke, Balder's Grove and Temple lay in ashes, while Frithiof sat within his dragon ship and wept.

Chapter XIV

Frithiof in Exile

AS "Ellida" passed the strand, Frithiof gazed from the deck with gloomy brow upon the scene of conflagration, from which the thick smoke still ascended, and anguish filled his breast.

"Woe, woe is me!" he cried to himself; "in accusation rises yonder smoke to Odin's halls! Banished was I by Helge but for a brief space; now must I forever leave my native land. Be thou, O sea, from hence my country. On thy blue billows will I make my home. Framnäs no longer is my dwelling; thou, swift 'Ellida,' shalt be now my house. My bride, too, art thou in thy black garb, since she in lily robes is lost to me forever. Free dost thou roll, O mighty ocean! No tyrant's will can ever do thee wrong; the only King thou callest master is he who looks upon thee calmly when thy white breast heaves in wildest fury, and thunder peals are swallowed in thy voice. No grave-mound e'er shall rise above me; thy tossing waves shall cover deep my bones."

❖ FRITHIOF IN EXILE ❖

Here Björn approached and touched his shoulder, saying, "Look! yonder King Helge makes his way amid the rocks. Methinks he hath yet a word to speak with thee." Ten dragon ships were seen approaching. Frithiof sprang to his feet and bade his men prepare for battle. Joyously they shouted:

"King Helge wearies of the crown. His soul thirsts for Valhalla's delights. Now shall he fall; bold Frithiof leads us unto victory."

On came the ships in a half-circle, surrounding "Ellida." Helge had given orders to slay Frithiof and all his men, but to capture the ship as their prize. Suddenly a strange sight met the eyes of Frithiof and his warriors and filled them with amazement: nine of the ships sank slowly down beneath the waves, while Helge himself escaped with difficulty to the shore. Björn laughed.

"'Twas I that scuttled the ships last night, unseen. A good trick it was, and all befell as I had hoped, save that King Helge has escaped!"

Now all the sails were spread and the ship sped swiftly out to sea. Backward gazing, Frithiof watched the fast receding shore and chanted a song that moved all hearts to sadness:



THE FRITHIOF SAGA



Farewell ! mounds dreaming
By wavelets blue,
Where west winds streaming
White blossoms strew !
Odin revealeth
And doometh well
What man concealeth ; —
Farewell ! Farewell !

Farewell, ye bowers,
Ye limpid streams,
Where 'mid spring flowers,
Youth wandered in dreams.
Ye friends of childhood
Who loved me well, —
Till death remembered, —
Farewell ! Farewell !

My love insulted,
My dwelling brent,
My honor tarnished,
In exile sent, —
Heart bideth in sadness
Norns' fatal spell.
To Life's young gladness
Farewell ! Farewell !

Chapter XV

Frithiof's Viking Life

THUS Frithiof became a viking, the sea his only home; and these are the laws he made for his followers:

"Pitch no tent on thy ship; seek no slumber below. On his shield sleeps the viking, his sword in his hand. His tent is the blue dome of heaven.

"Short be thy sword, like the hammer of Thor; strike close to the foe.

"When the storm roars on high, spread wider the sails: The sea in its wrath fills the viking with joy; a coward is he who would furl.

"Wine is drink of the gods. Enjoy thou the gift, but drown not thy senses — beware! He who falls on the land rises quickly again; who staggers here is the death-goddess' prey!

"Protect the merchant ship on the high seas so due tribute it doth not refuse. Thou art lord of the waves; he's a slave to his pelf. Thy steel is as good as his gold. By lot shall the booty be shared among all; complain not



THE FRITHIOF SAGA



however it falls. The Sea King himself throws no dice on the deck; he seeks only glory from his foes.

“Heaves a viking in sight, then come boarding and strife; from us he is banished who yields. Mercy fits him who conquers; he who lays down his arms at thy feet is no longer thy foe.

“Prayer is Valhalla’s child, and a scoundrel is he who, ruthless, refuses to hear it.

“The viking’s rewards are his wounds; before all, on the brow and the breast are they glorious. He who seeketh ere issue of battle to bind them no longer is comrade of viking.”

Thus ran the code of Frithiof, and no laws of Odin were more strictly obeyed. Many a battle did these heroes fight and win, for there was not their like on all the seas; and soon their fame spread far and wide. But naught of this had power to gladden Frithiof’s heart; he would sit, helm in hand, for hours with clouded brow, gazing out over the rolling waters. Only in battle did the shadow vanish, as with flashing eyes and fiercely swelling breast he led his men to victory.

For three years they sailed the seas northward and westward; then turning south, his dragon anchored one day off the coast of Greek-land (Greece). With

✻ FRITHIOF'S VIKING LIFE ✻

wonder Frithiof gazed upon that beauteous land, with its noble ruined temples rising amid fragrant groves. The tales his father had been wont to tell of those fair isles still lingered in his memory like some lovely vision — a dream that now was realized. Hither had he once thought to flee with Ingeborg from the haughty Helge, here with her to found an abode of bliss, but the noble maiden had denied his prayers and shrunk from such a breach of duty and of custom. Amid these fair scenes memories of his native land awoke afresh within him, and he longed to see it once again. But most of all he yearned for a sight of Ingeborg and to visit his father's grave-mound.

“Why do I linger here in strange seas and stain my hands with blood?” he asked himself. “Enough of glory have I won, and I care not for gold. North points the flag on the masthead. To the Northland the home of my youth! Up, ‘Ellida’! no longer we’ll tarry, but follow that token from Heaven!”

Chapter XVI

Frithiof comes to King Ring's Court

ON his high-seat sat King Ring, celebrating the great Yule tide feast that fell on the winter solstice, and beside him Ingeborg, his wife, like chilly Autumn with the youthful Spring. The mead-horn went round, and joyous shouts and laughter filled the hall. Suddenly through the doorway entered an old man, tall of stature and wrapped from head to foot in a great bearskin. In his hand he bore a staff and walked as if bowed with age. None knew him, and he quietly took his place on the bench near the door, reserved for the poor. The courtiers smiled to one another and pointed jeeringly at the shaggy figure, while one playfully approached with intent to make sport of him for the amusement of the others. With flashing eyes the stranger seized the rash youth, whirled him about in the air, and set him again on his feet unharmed; whereat the courtiers' smiles deserted them, and they fell straightway silent.

❖ KING RING'S COURT ❖

“What noise is that down yonder?” cried Ring sternly.

“Come hither, old man, who thus disturbest our kingly peace! Who art thou? What brings thee here? Whence comest thou?”

“Much dost thou ask, O King,” replied the stranger, “yet all will I tell thee save my name, — that concerneth none but me. In Penitence was I reared; Want was my inheritance; my latest bed a Wolf’s lair. Astride my dragon, with its mighty wings, I flew swiftly hither from afar; now my good ship lies frozen in upon thy shores. I came to hear thy words of wisdom, famed through all the land. When thy people just now sought to mock me, I seized a vain fool and swung him round about — but I did him no harm. Forgive me, King!”

“Truly,” the monarch cried, — “thou speakest well, and wisdom’s teachings bid us honor age. Come, sit at the board. But first, I pray thee, doff thy strange disguisement and show thyself in thy true form, for deception is ever wont to be the foe of gladness.”

At this the stranger let fall his hairy covering, and there, in place of an old man, appeared a youth of noble stature, his loft brow shaded with bright

✧ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✧

flowing locks. A blue mantle hung from his mighty shoulders, and his tunic was held in place by a wide silver belt, on which, with cunning skill, beasts of the forest were embossed. Heavy gold armlets encircled his arm; at his left side hung a sword that gleamed like lightning. Fair as Balder, like to the mighty Thor in strength of limb, he stood before the King and his astonished court. For a moment his keen glance wandered about the hall, then he seated himself calmly at the board. The blood rushed to the cheeks of the Queen till she glowed as crimson as the ice-fields lit by flaring Northern lights.

But now the trumpets sounded the signal for silence. It was the hour of the vow, and the crowned boar was borne into the hall on a silver charger and placed upon the board. Touching the head of the boar, Ring said:

“Hearken, ye warriors, to my vow! I swear to conquer Frithiof, howsoever stout a champion he be; so help me Odin, Thor, and Frey!”

The stranger rose with a frown and dashed his sword upon the board with such a clang that all the warriors sprang from their seats.

“Hear thou me likewise, good Sir King,” he

✻ KING RING'S COURT ✻

cried: "That Frithiof whom thou namest is my friend and kinsman ; and him I swear to guard with life and limb, so help me Norns and my good sword!"

The King smiled. "Thou speakest boldly," he answered, "but words are free in Northland's royal halls. Fill for him, Queen, yon horn with draught of welcome. I hope he'll tarry with us as our guest till Spring returns."

This horn was a precious heirloom of the house, broken from the forehead of the urus. Its feet were of silver wonderfully wrought, while the golden rings about it were carven with strange runes. With downcast eyes Ingeborg handed it to the guest, but she trembled so that the wine was spilled, and red drops gleamed on her white hand like evening's purple blushes on a lily.

Unmoved, the hero took the mighty horn, lifted it to his lips and at one draught drained it to the honor of his host. Then at a sign from the King, the scald smote on his harpstrings and chanted many a heart-stirring song and legend. In lofty words he sang of love and friendship, of freedom and the country's glory, of the high gods and Valhalla's wonders, till fire shot forth from every

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

eye, and involuntarily each warrior grasped the handle of his sword.

Deeply they drank throughout the night, and many a champion, like a tower of strength in battle, was vanquished by the sweetly foaming mead.

Chapter XVII

The Sledge Excursion

“**H**O for a sledge ride over the frozen lake!” cried Ring one day; and the servitors hastened to loose one of the pawing steeds from the royal stables and harness it before a splendid sledge, over the seat of which was thrown a silky sealskin.

“’T is not safe on the lake,” said the stranger. “The ice is thin and weak in some parts, and should it give way, full cold and deep would be thy bath!”

“Nay, not so easily do monarchs drown,” replied the King; “let him who fears it, go around the shore!”

The stranger said no more, but frowning darkly, hastened to fasten on his steel skates, while the impatient courser pawed the air and whinnied loudly.

“Speed on, my steed,” cried Ring, “and let us see if thou art sprung from Sleipner’s blood!”

Away dashed the sledge with the speed of the

✱ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✱

whirlwind, the stout-hearted old king exulting in the motion and heeding not the entreaties of his wife; but swift as they flew, the stranger still outstripped them, circling about in wide curves or cutting figures on the ice. Meanwhile, false Ran, the spouse of the Sea-god, has marked what is passing above. She cleaves a broad fissure in the sea's silvery roof, and into the up-foaming waves plunge horse and sledge. But swift as the wind flies the stranger thither. Fixing his steel shoes firmly in the ice, he seizes the horse by the mane and with a mighty jerk, pulls it and sledge together back on to the ice.

"In sooth," said the King, "that deed doth merit praise; e'en Frithiof himself could do no better. And now, my Fleet-of-foot, let us back to the palace again."

Chapter XVIII

Frithiof's Temptation

SPRING is come once more ; birds warble in the treetops ; freed from their icy bonds, the streams leap gaily downward to the vales below ; the roses part their delicate sheaths and blossom red as Frigga's cheeks. King Ring will now go hunting, and forthwith a joyous stir pervades the court. Bows twang, quivers rattle, fiery coursers paw the ground, the hooded falcon screams for its victim, and scarce can the huntsmen keep in leash the eager hounds. Fair as Frigga, dazzling as the battle-maiden Rota, sits the Queen upon her milk-white steed like a star on a summer cloud. Her hunting dress is of green, embroidered with gold, and blue plumes wave from her velvet cap.

Led by the royal pair, the gay train wends its way into the forest, and soon the sport begins. Loud bay the hounds ; up mount the hawks into

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

the clear sky ; horns sound ; the frightened game seeks lair and covert ; and the eager huntsmen scatter in pursuit.

King Ring has fallen behind ; old and feeble, he can no longer follow the lengthening chase, while beside him silent and thoughtful, rides his guest. At last they reached a rocky glen shut in by thick-clustering trees and thickets, and here the King dismounted from his courser, saying :

“ Full weary am I, stranger ; here will I rest me in this pleasant spot.”

“ Nay, sleep not on the cold hard ground,” replied the other ; “ I had better lead thee back to thy own halls.”

“ Sweet slumber comes when least expected ; ’t is the way of the gods,” said Ring. “ Surely thou dost not grudge thy host an hour of rest ! ”

Without further words, the stranger spread his cloak upon the ground and seated himself on a fallen tree-trunk, while Ring, stretching himself out upon the mantle, laid his head against the other’s knees. His eyes closed and soon he slept, sweetly as an infant cradled in its mother’s arms. As the stranger gazed gloomily down on the face of the King, he heard a rustling in the branches above him



FRITHIOF'S TEMPTATION



to the left, and lifting his eyes he saw a coal-black bird, which began to sing :

Haste thee, Frithiof, slay the dotard, with one sword-stroke grant him rest !

Take the Queen ; she 's thine ; her sacred kiss of plighted troth she gave.

Here no human eye can see thee — silent is the deep, dark grave !

Scarce had the sound ceased when from a bough on the right, a snow-white bird began :

Though no human eye should see thee, Odin would the death-stroke view.

Wouldst thou murder him in slumber ? Cowardly thy bright sword stain ?

Know, whate'er besides thou winnest, hero-fame thou ne'er shalt gain !

Thus sang the two birds, while contending thoughts struggled within the listener. Suddenly he seized his sword by the handle and flung it far from him into the shadow of the forest. Whereupon the black bird, with heavy flapping of its wings, flew back to the dark halls of Night, the abode of perjurers and assassins ; while, blithely warbling, upward the white bird took its flight and vanished at last in the blue of heaven. At that moment the King awoke and rising to his feet, said :

❖ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ❖

"Sweet indeed hath been my slumber. Well they rest whom valor's sword doth guard. But where is thy war blade, stranger? Methought the Brother of Lightning never left thy side. Say, who hath parted you?"

"Little boots it," answered the other; "swords are plenty in the Northland. The sword is not always a good companion. Its tongue is sharp and it speaketh few words of peace. In steel there dwells an evil spirit, sprung from Loke's dark abode, to whom not even sleep is sacred, nor the silver locks of age."

"Hearken, youth!" began the King. "I slept not. 'T was but to try thee I did feign to slumber — a fool is he who trusts a man or a blade untried. Thou art Frithiof! I knew thee even when thou didst cross my threshold. But wherefore didst thou creep nameless and in such disguise into my palace? Wherefore, if not to rob me of my wife? Honor comes not nameless to the banquet, Frithiof! Ever open-faced she meets men's glances, clear as sunlight is her shield. The fame of Frithiof's deeds has reached us, — a terror both of gods and men; careless alike of cloven shield or burning temple; the mightiest warrior known in all the land. And



FRITHIOF'S TEMPTATION



this bold hero, this fierce viking, creeps, a beggar, to our hall! Nay, cast not down thy eyes before me. I, too, have once been young and felt as thou. Youth, well I know, hath fiery passions. Much have I thought on thee, O Frithiof. I have pitied and have pardoned thee. Harken now! I am growing old and feeble, and soon for me the grave shall open. Then take unto thyself my kingdom and my wife. Until that time, be thou a son to me and guard my house as thou hast done before. And now, my son, let there be no more feud between us!"

"Not as a thief did I enter thy halls, O King," replied Frithiof proudly. "Had I come to seize thy Queen, who could have withstood me? 'T was but to behold once again her who before the altar gave me her betrothal kiss. But ah, what slumbering fires my rashness hath awakened! Too long already have I tarried. Upon my head the gods have poured their wrath. Even the gentle Balder, lover of all mankind, spurts my prayers. 'T was I who burned his temple. 'Wolf in the Sanctuary,' am I called. All joy ceases when my name is spoken. The child clings trembling to its father's knees. Once more will I seek the broad, free

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

ocean, whither earth and man have banished me. Out, out, my dragon! Too long in idleness thou hast lain. Again to the storm wind shalt thou spread thy pinions, and bathe thy black breast in the dashing spray! All — all on earth is lost to me forever; the tempest's roar, the clash of arms shall whisper comfort to my soul once more! So will I live, so will I fighting fall; and mounting then to Odin's throne, the gods, appeased, shall speak my pardon."

Chapter XIX

Death of King Ring

PALE on his throne sat the aged monarch, for he felt his end approaching. Ingeborg, trembling, stood beside him, and a circle of silent warriors stood about the royal pair. Sorrowfully Frithiof entered to say farewell.

“This day for the last time do ye behold me,” he said; “for the last time my foot doth tread the soil of earth. Henceforth, till the Norns shall send their summons the ocean’s boundless wastes shall be my home. Take back the ring round which such memories cluster, Ingeborg; let it be a parting token from me. And thou, O King, go not with thy Queen by moonlight to the strand, nor when the pale stars shine, for at your feet the waves might chance to toss my bleaching bones.”

“Nay, Frithiof,” replied the King, “such mournful complaints become not men; in maids they may be pardoned. For me the death song soundeth, not

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

for thee. 'Tis I must hence, not thou! Take thou my realm and guard it well. Take Ingeborg as thy wife, and be a father to my infant son. Ever through life hath peace been dearest to me; well have I loved to sit with friends about the board; yet with a strong hand have I guarded throne and honor, and cloven many a shield on sea and land; nor ever hath man seen my cheek turn pale. Victory hath been mine, and glory. One boon only have the gods denied me — to mount to Valhalla from the battle-field. Death by the sword is the death of heroes; to linger on, — the straw death, — never such will Ring live to endure!" And therewith he plunged his sword into his breast. As the life-blood gushed forth he had his horn brought to him, and raising it aloft, with glowing face he cried:

"To thy glory I drain this, my country, thou Northland! Ye gods of Valhalla, all hail, all hail!"

Silence reigned within the hall; none gave way to grief lest the dying man's last moments should be saddened. Sinking back on his cushions, the King clasped Ingeborg's hand for the last time — greeted his friend and son with a parting glance, and



KING RING'S death

✧ DEATH OF KING RING ✧

sighing, his soul ascended to the All-Father. Great was the mourning for him throughout the kingdom ; amid universal lamentations the good King's mound was heaped above him, while scalds with sounding dirges glorified his memory.

Chapter XX

The Election to the Kingdom

“**T**O the Ting! To the Ting!” The message flies o’er hill and vale; the people are summoned to elect their King. Champions try their swords, vassals polish their lord’s helm and buckler till they shine like the sun. Thus with clang of arms the warriors assembled on the open plain. In their midst on the wide Ting-stone stood Frithiof, and at his side King Ring’s son, a fair child with golden hair.

“Too young is Ring’s heir,” was murmured through the multitude; “no chief is he to lead us into battle, or sit in judgment on the Ting-stone.”

But Frithiof placed the child upon his shield and held him high aloft, saying: “Northmen, behold your King, a vigorous offshoot of the fallen oak! Doth he not bear him well upon the shield? Hear now my vow: I swear to guard for him his Kingdom, till with his father’s circlet he shall one day here be crowned.” Then raising his eyes to heaven,

✻ THE ELECTION ✻

he added: "Forsete, son of Balder, be my witness!
O thou who judgest justly, strike me dead if e'er
I break my word!"

Meanwhile the King's son sat on Frithiof's gleaming shield, gazing about him proudly; but at length he began to weary of it, and with one bound sprang lightly to the ground. A shout went up from all the Ting:

"Ha, that was indeed a royal leap! Aye, shield-borne, thee we choose to be our King! And thou, O Frithiof, who shalt guard his crown and kingdom, take Ingeborg, our Queen, to be thy wife!"

At these words Frithiof's brow darkened. "To choose a King are you come," he answered; my bride I woo of my own choice. In anger still doth Balder look upon me. 'Twas he that took my Ingeborg from me, and he alone can give her back to me."

Chapter XXI

The Reconciliation

NO peace was there yet in Frithiof's heart. As fire had once consumed the temple, so within him still blazed the flames of his remorse that by his act had Balder's earthly dwelling been destroyed. Betaking himself to his father's grave-mound he sat all night alone upon the cairn, beseeching Balder to smile upon him once again. And lo! in the darkness a wondrous vision grew before his eyes. In Balder's Grove he saw a gleaming temple slowly rise; but scarcely had he gazed upon it in amazement, when again 't was swallowed in the gloom of night.

Roused by fresh hope of winning the offended god's forgiveness, he hastily returned to Ring's dominions and summoned architects to plan for the building of a new temple. Just as he had seen it in his vision should the home of Balder actually rise. So filled was he with this one thought that nothing else had power to move him, neither feast, nor chase, nor sounding minstrel lay.



THE RECONCILIATION



At last the work was finished, and like the far-famed shrine of Upsal, the great temple stood a wonder to all eyes. A brazen portal richly carved led to the sanctuary; two rows of lofty columns supported the arching roof, like a great shield of gold. Facing the doorway stood the high altar, hewn from a single block of Northern marble and polished with rare skill; round about it were graven runes of solemn import. Above, in a spacious niche, was Balder's august image, wrought all of purest silver. On a rocky hillside rose the building, its reflection mirrored in the sea below, while round about on three sides stretched a smiling valley, known as Balder's Dale. Leafy groves adorned the flowery meadows. No sound but happy bird songs broke the silence; all nature breathed of peace.

With deep emotion Frithiof trod those holy precincts. Twelve rosy-cheeked maidens, priestesses of the temple, robed all in white, advanced to the high altar and chanted a holy song in praise of Balder. They sang how beloved was the gentle god by every creature; and when he fell by evil Loke's malice, how heaven itself with earth and ocean wept. And as leaning on his sword the hero listened, the

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

dark shadow, that so long had lain upon his spirit, lifted. Tender memories of his childhood woke within him, while calm and serene as the moon in the skies of Summer, Balder the Good looked down upon him and filled his soul with peace. Then with slow steps approached the high-priest of the temple, not young and fair like the god at whose shrine he worshipped, but tall and majestic, his noble features stamped with heavenly mildness and graced with flowing beard and locks of silver. With unwonted reverence Frithiof bent his haughty head before the seer, who thus began :

“Welcome, son Frithiof, to this holy temple. Long have I looked for thee to come, for force, though restless over land and sea it wanders, turns ever, wearied, home again at last. Oft did the mighty Thor wend thus to Jötunheim, the giants’ kingdom ; yet despite his godlike belt and magic gauntlets, the giant King still sits upon his throne. Evil, itself a force, yields not to evil. Virtue without strength is but child’s play, the glancing sun-beam on the shield, a wavering shadow on the earth’s broad breast. Yet neither may strength without virtue long survive. It consumes itself, like rusting sword in some dark grave-mound—a debauch

✻ THE RECONCILIATION ✻

from which he who yieldeth to it wakens filled with shame.

“Behold the mighty earth! It is the body of Ymir, the world-giant from whom all strength proceeds — its rushing streams his blue veins; its iron and brass his sinews; yet all is barren, bare, and empty till heaven’s bright sun-rays stream upon it from afar. Then springs the grass; fair blossoms deck the verdant meadows, and fresh leaves, the trees; the swelling buds burst forth; all nature breathes new life from the abundant earth. Thus is it with man’s strength: it yields naught but blessing when transfigured by the heavenly rays of virtue.

“What the sun is to the earth, was Balder to Valhalla. His pure soul was the gem that fastened the wreath divine. When, slain by evil Loke, he descended to pale Hel’s realm, Odin’s wisdom straight began to languish, and the strength of mighty Thor to dwindle; the prisoned forces of evil, once mastered by the gods, stirred in their abysses; the dragon Nidhöggn gnawed at the roots of the Tree of Life, and its leafy crown fast withered. Again the war broke out ’twixt good and evil — the strife that through all creation still endures.

“This is but the emblem of what passes in every

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

human breast. Hast thou forgotten, my son, those days when Balder dwelt within thy spirit? Pure then was every thought and feeling, thy whole life glad as a woodland songster's dream. In every child does Balder reappear; in each that is born doth Hel restore her victim.

"But in each soul is also found the blind god Höder. Evil is ever born blind, like the bear-cub; in darkness it enwraps itself, while good goes clad in shining robes of light. Loke still creepeth busily about to guide the hand of murder; with Balder dies the strength of heart and spirit, and anew the struggle in man's breast begins. Virtue sits hopeless mid the shadows, as the fair god in the darkness of the underworld.

"So hath it been with thee, Frithiof. Passion and thirst for vengeance rose within thee, and Balder's temple sank to earth in ashes. Now thou seekest atonement; but knowest thou its meaning rightly? Nay, boldly meet my gaze and turn not pale, O youth! But one atoner is there on our earth—his name is Death. All time itself is but a troubled stream from vast eternity; atonement came from the All-Father's throne to restore us thither purified. The high gods, too, have sinned. Their

✻ THE RECONCILIATION ✻

day of battle, the Twilight of the Gods, is their atonement, and from their fall a higher life shall rise. Ah, bloody is the day that sees their strife with the powers of evil ! The golden-combed cock that sits on Odin's golden palace doth shrilly call to arms. Bursting his chains, up springs the giant wolf from the abyss; the earth-enveloping serpent writhes in fury; boiling and foaming, the sea o'erflows the land; the whole earth shakes; mountains crash together; the Tree of Life groans and trembles; in terror flee the shades that hover about the path of the dead. On the corpse-ship, made from the nails of the unburied dead, Loke, the wolf Fenris, and the giant Hrymer ride to join the battle. On come the flame giants, their swords gleaming like the red glow of the forge. Over the rainbow bridge they gallop — with a frightful crash it breaks beneath their horses' tread; the heavens are rent asunder; thunder peals sound from pole to pole; the shouts of terrified mortals mingle with the groans of the dwarfs, who, pale and trembling, cower in their rocky caverns.

“ But already have the gods and heroes donned their shining armor, and, led by Odin, crowned with his golden circlet and shaking aloft his gleaming

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

spear, over Vigrid's boundless plain they move in mighty train. There arrayed against each other stand the hosts, and the strife begins. Spears hiss, swords clash, the battle-cries of gods and giants fill the air; the furious bellowing of the serpent and the howling of Fenris shake the dome of heaven. One by one the gods are slain; but not unavenged do they perish, for the powers of evil also fall to rise no more, while from the flames of the world they rise to higher life. Aye, though the stars fall from the heavens and the earth is buried deep beneath the waves, yet newly born, the abode of man once more arises from the waters; a new sun shines on smiling mead and golden harvest. Then shall those golden runic tablets, lost in Time's far dawning and graven with the wisdom of the gods, again be found amid the springing grass.

“Struggle and death are but the fiery proof of virtue; atonement another birth to higher life. The best, the happiest part of our existence, lies beyond the grave-mound; low and deep-stained with guilt and error is all we find 'neath heaven's starlit dome.

“This life, too, hath its atonement — dim type of that still higher yet to come. Earth is but Heaven's shadow; human life the outer court of

✻ THE RECONCILIATION ✻

Balder's heavenly temple. Decked with purple is the proud steed led to sacrifice — a symbol, rightly read, that blood is the red dawn of every day of grace. Yet by the sacrifice of no other may thine own guilt be redeemed. The wrongs that man commits he must himself atone for. The sacrifice All-Father demands from thee, more sweet to him than blood and reek of victim, is thy fierce hate and burning vengeance offered on the altar of thy heart. If thou slay not these, then little will this proud arched temple serve thee. Not with piled-up stones mayst thou atone to Balder. First with thyself and with thy foe be reconciled ; then, Frithiof, shalt thou have the bright god's pardon.

“Hear now, what wondrous news hath reached us from the South : there, so 't is said, was a new Balder, born of a pure Virgin, sent by the great All-Father to lead man to atonement. Peace was his war-cry ; his bright sword, Love ; crowning his helm, the dove of Innocence. Pure was his life and pure were his teachings ; dying, he forgave. Palms wave above his far-off grave, but still his teachings spread from vale to vale, melting hard hearts, joining hand to hand, upraising such a realm of Peace as never yet was seen upon the earth. But little know I of

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

this creed, alas! yet oft in better moments dimly I gaze upon its streaming light, and loud my heart proclaims to me the time will come when it shall also spread through all the North. Levelled then will be our grave-mounds; lost in the stream of time our names, while other men shall flourish, other chieftains reign. Ye happier race, who then shall drink from the New Light's shining goblet, I greet ye in the spirit. Hail! all hail! Despise us not whose eager gaze hath ceaselessly sought the radiant light of Heaven! Scorn not those to whom the divine ray was still wrapped in veiling shadows! The All-Father hath many envoys — He Himself is One!

“Frithiof, thou hatest Bele's sons; but wherefore? Because, proud of their descent from Seming, Odin's royal offspring, they did refuse their sister's hand to thee. But ‘birth is chance,’ thou sayst, ‘not merit.’ Know, my son, man ever boasts of fortune, not of merit. Thou art proud of thy strength and of thy glorious deeds; but didst thou give thyself this force? Was it not Thor who strung thy sinewy arm firm as the oak limb? Is it not God-sprung courage that throbs so joyously within thy breast? Beside thy cradle the Norns sang hero-songs to thee.

✻ THE RECONCILIATION ✻

Thus are thy noblest gifts no merit, but thy fortune, — of no more worth than that of which the princes boast. Condemn not, judge not, others' pride, — then none will judge thine own. King Helge is no more — ”

“What! Helge dead!” cried Frithiof, starting. “Where and how came he to his death?”

“While thou,” continued the high priest, “wert building here this temple, he, as thou knowest, did undertake a foray 'gainst the Finns. Within their borders, on a barren mountain-peak there stood an ancient temple of the heathen Jumala. It was closed and abandoned, and none for many years had ever crossed its threshold. Above the portal, tottering to its fall as it appeared, was placed an idol of the god, and an old tradition handed down from sire to sire said, whoever first should enter in the temple should Jumala behold. No sooner did Helge hear this than, blind with rage, he scaled the barren steep, bent on destroying the hated deity's abode. He found the key still in the door, thick covered o'er with rust. Grasping the moss-grown posts he shook them fiercely, and thereupon, with tremendous crash, down plunged the image of the heathen god; and thus did Helge view the dreaded Jumala.

“Now Halfdan rules alone. Give him thy hand,

✻ THE FRITHIOF SAGA ✻

brave Frithiof. Sacrifice thy hatred in this holy shrine. Thus saith Balder, and I his high priest this demand of thee. Refuse, and vain will be thy efforts to avert his godlike wrath."

Here Halfdan entered through the doorway and with doubtful glance lingered on the threshold of the temple. But Frithiof unbuckled Angurvadel from his side and placed it with his shield against the altar. Unarmed he approached his enemy and said kindly :

"In this strife he is noblest who first doth offer his hand in pledge of peace."

Flushing deeply, Halfdan doffed his iron gauntlet, and with a firm hand-clasp the two heroes sealed their reconciliation. Now the high priest removed the curse that had rested on Frithiof since the burning of the temple, and as he joyfully raised his head, no longer an outlaw, lo ! Ingeborg entered, radiant in her bridal garments and robed in royal ermine. With tears in her beautiful eyes, she sank trembling in her brother's arms, but Halfdan tenderly transferred his burden to Frithiof's faithful breast ; and kneeling before the altar of the pardoning Balder, with joined hands the long-parted lovers sealed their nuptial vows.

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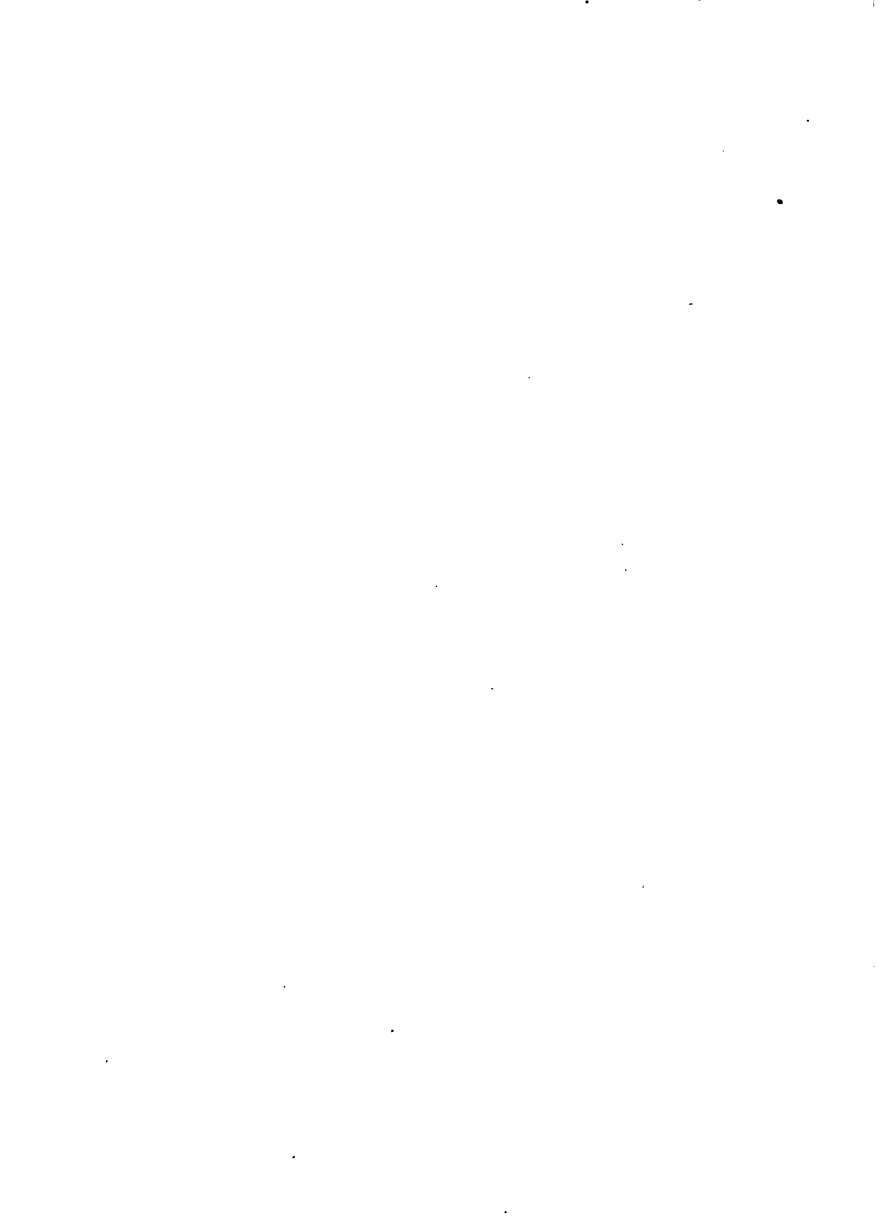
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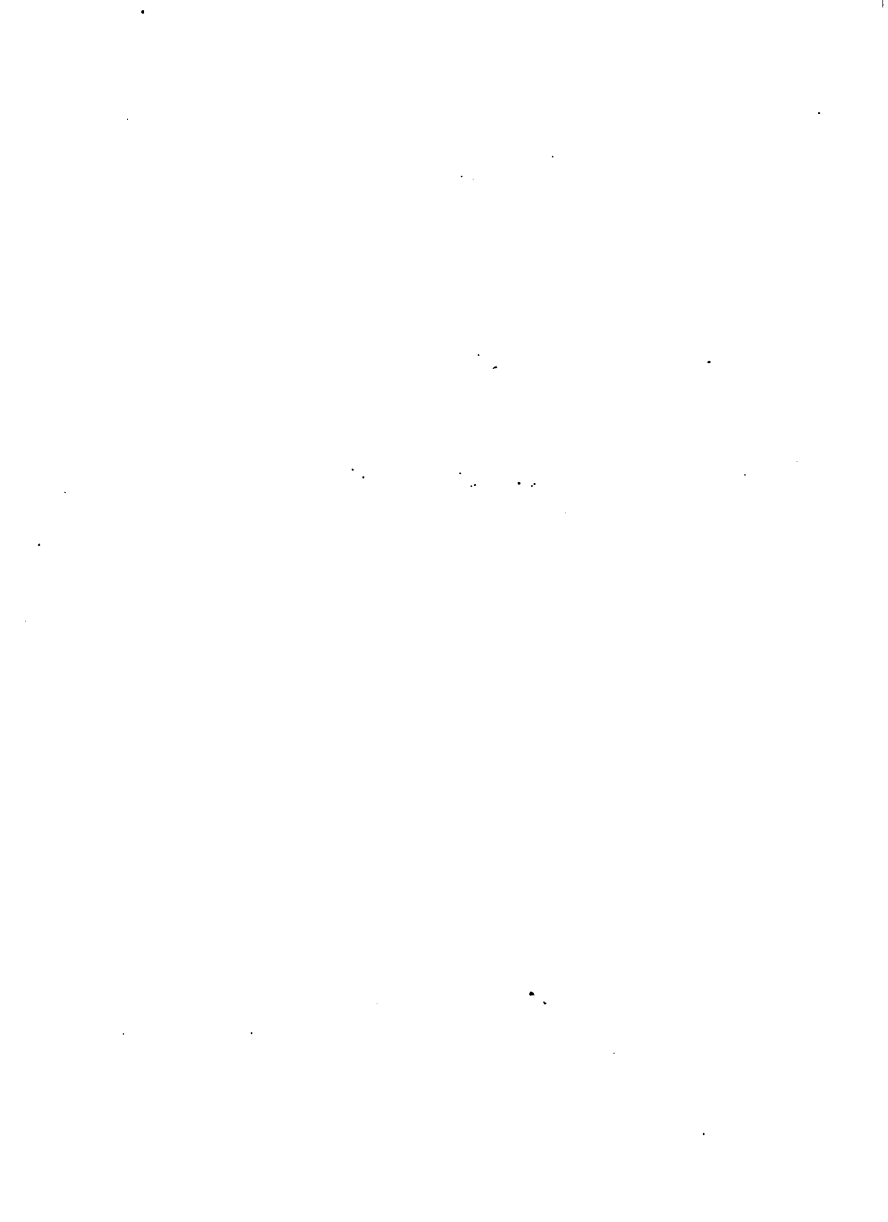
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